

Caritas India: Integrating Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change in the National Plan of Action for Children 2016



From the inception of the National Plan of Action for Children (NPAC), Caritas India was part of several rounds of civil society deliberations. It submitted a host of recommendations particularly on children in different risk settings vis-à-vis disasters to the Ministry of Women and Child Development, on 14 April 2016. Concurrently, Caritas India was the resource organisation to various consultations organised by India Alliance for Child Rights, a coalition of child rights organisations in India. The recommendations submitted and those accepted by the Government in the NPAC 2016 are as follows, with the preliminary analysis highlighting the key inclusions and misses vis-à-vis children in disasters.

National Plan of Action for Children 2016

On 24 Jan 2017, the Government of India adopted the much awaited *National Plan of Action for Children (NPAC) 2016, Safe Children-Happy Childhood*. This Plan translates the policy commitments under the National Policy for Children 2013 into actionable and monitorable strategies and activities. Survival, Health, Nutrition; Education and Development; Protection and Participation are four key priority areas in the National Policy for Children, founded on the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC). The Plan also has envisaged institution of a National co-ordination Action Group to monitor the implementation and progress, with similar body in the states.

It is important to mention here that *Social Protection* has been an area of policy concern for the Government of India, and was one of the issues it opted for deliberation at the *High-Level Meeting on Cooperation for Child Rights in the Asia-Pacific Region, 2016*¹. Likewise, the NPAC has recognised new and emerging trends of risks for children in India. Here, the Plan has integrated *Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change* concerns across the four key priorities.

Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change

The NPAC succeeds the Plan of Action adopted in 2005. This was also the time India had signed the Hyogo Framework for Action on Disaster Risk Reduction (2005-2015). The previous plan had failed to recognise disasters as an area of concern from children's safety viewpoint, despite coming into force after the mega disaster of Indian Ocean Tsunami. The NPAC 2016 has addressed this omission, and



¹Social Protection Delivers Equity and Rights for Children and Catalyses Sustainable Economic Growth in Asia and the Pacific, High-Level Meeting on Cooperation for Child Rights in the Asia-Pacific Region Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 7-9 November 2016

included DRR measures across all four priority areas.

Moreover, India signed up to the SDGs, Sendai Framework for Action on Disaster Risk Reduction², and Climate Change Convention. These conventions and the UNCRC are mutually reinforcing. Integrating DRR and climate change in NPAC was thus, a *sin-quo-non* and an opportunity for Caritas India to advocate for greater attention and formal recognition.

Much emphasis is laid on overcoming malnutrition among children and strengthening related schemes for women and children. Actions under *Key Priority 1 on Survival, Health and Nutrition*, if implemented well, will certainly act as disaster preparedness measure for children.

The NPAC has brought the disaster management authorities within the purview of the Plan by recognising actions for which the Ministry of Home Affairs (nodal agency) and National and State Disaster Management Authorities are to be held responsible.

Key Priority 2, Education and Development, Sub-Objective 2.2.6 provides for preparing mitigation plans based on mapping of schools and localities liable to be affected by natural or manmade disasters and carrying out safety audits as per NDMA School Safety Policy 2016; orienting teachers and SMC members on DRR and preparedness, making DRR and preparedness part of regular curriculum, including risk assessment, mock drills and information on emergency response; developing child friendly spaces and age-specific education kits and materials; teachers' trainings, psychosocial support and counselling for trauma management etc. *Sub-Objective 2.10* reiterates capacity building of teachers and students on DRR.

Key Priority 3, Protection, Sub-objective 3.3, has identified various actions to ensure child protection in all humanitarian actions and is also the section to which most recommendations of Caritas India are incorporated (See Annexure).

The Missing Links

The above analysis gives some reasons to be hopeful with the Plan. And much needs to be done by Humanitarian organisations, particularly those working and focusing on children, to make the Disaster Management authorities aware of their new action agenda. However, there are certain misses too, which will remain areas of persisting policy engagement for Caritas India.

Risk factors and vulnerabilities have not been explained in the NPAC, and climate change occurs only in sporadic references here and there, with a mention of agrarian distress³. The NPAC⁴ mentions about developing regulations for climate-smart infrastructure; identifying high risk districts; and developing preparedness and response plans for ensuring health and nutrition services to pregnant women, mothers and children during disasters. This reads

like a disjointed action agenda, because the NPAC is silent on how climate induced disasters like droughts impact children in multiple ways and thereby what should be the mitigation actions to ensure child safety.

Several vulnerabilities that make children susceptible to protracted impacts and shocks in the aftermath of disasters go unmentioned in the NPAC. The psycho-social, emotional and psychosomatic stresses and trauma have not been attended to either, while overall, the NPAC talks of counselling at various places as a much needed succour.

Out of school children have largely remained out of the focus, if not for the sub-objective 2.6 of Key Priority 2, which calls for 'Ensuring that all out of school children are tracked, rescued, rehabilitated and have access to their right to education'. Caritas India was particular in recommending integration and coverage of out of school children in various DRR related programmes at community level. The premise being, why should the schooling status be the criterion for protection of children when several factors are involved in bringing a child to school and not bringing too!

Future course of action: Ensure the Government delivers on its promises to Children of India

In recent years, India has taken public positions in favour of children. In 2016, Caritas India remained an active participant and contributor to various child related policy frameworks, in addition to the NPAC. These included recommendations to the *Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill 2016* (<http://bit.ly/2k9CJy7>); and *Draft National Education Policy 2016*. It also participated in the NGO consultations in the run up to the *High-Level Meeting of Asian and Pacific Governments* in late 2016, to strengthen the vision and commitments to Social Protection measures focusing Disaster Risks and Management, at the South-South cooperation level for child rights.

All the above pending policies are also concerns addressed in some way or the other in the NPAC, briefly. The NPAC has paved way for seeking inter-departmental and ministerial coordination and actions on child-centred DRR and Climate Change Adaptations.

Caritas India will pursue this Plan within the humanitarian circle and take steps to make authorities aware of this development towards coalesced action. With such vital recognitions and inclusions in the NPAC, it is important for CSOs to act to assist and ensure the Government delivers on what it has promised to the children of India.

² After the completion of the Hyogo Framework for Action on DRR in 2015

³ See- NPAC 2016, Children in India: New and Emerging Areas (Pg. 13) and Sub-objective 2.2., Key Priority 2, Pg. 78 Actions 6)

⁴ See- NPAC 2016, sub-objective 1.3 under Key Priority 1 on Survival, Health and Nutrition, (Strategies 1.3.4- Action 3)

Recommendations made by Caritas India and accepted into the National Plan of Action for Children 2016, Safe Children-Happy Childhood

Chapter 1: Introduction

Strategies:

- Special emphasis on creating a cadre of well-qualified professionally trained mental health service providers and counsellors with adoption of child friendly techniques like Arts Based Therapy and others. (See NPAC 2016, Pg. 103; sub-objective 3.3; strategies 3.3.3, Action point 12)

Key Priority Area 1: Survival, Health and Nutrition

- Map the specific vulnerabilities of children living in hazard prone regions of the country and develop age and gender disaggregated MIS of their needs at Panchayat and district levels for hazard mitigation and preparedness programmes. (See NPAC 2016, Pg. 103; sub-objective 3.3; strategies 3.3.3., Action point 4)

Key Priority Area 2: Education and Development

- Ensure creation of adequate infrastructure to avoid usage of school building as relief shelters and/or create alternative mechanisms for quickly re-establishing education and returning children's sense of normalcy as it also helps in the recreational and trauma healing process. Special attention to be given to creation access to such measures for children with special abilities and from socially excluded communities. (See NPAC 2016, Pg 78, Sub-objective 2.2, Strategies 2.2.6, Action 9)
- Cover out of school children including children of migrant labourers, abandoned children, street children, internally displaced children and other vulnerable children in need of care and protection under quality alternative education and vocational training programmes. Devise tailored programmes for them if none exist or are inadequate. (See NPAC 2016, pg 80, sub-objective 2.6, Action 1)

Key Priority Area 3: Protection

- Ensure dignified access to quality and gender equitable regular nutrition under ICDS to the children, with special focus on regions (villages and blocks) populated with most vulnerable children.(Read with NPAC 2016, Pg 12, Bullet point 1)
- Such a distress alert system must be connected to the local police station and NGOs at source and destination, and the family/guardian of the child. (Read with- NPAC 2016; Pg 12, Bullet point 8)

Key Priority Area 4: Participation

- Capacity building and mock drills at the village levels must be ensured by forming cadres of children and youth volunteers, with leadership of young people from the socially excluded communities and those inhabiting the most hazard prone locations. (See NPAC 2016, Pg. 103; sub-objective 3.3; strategies 3.3.3., Action point 5)

Chapter 3: The National Plan of Action for Children

- Have an independent ombudsperson at the level of the local authority to redress grievances that are not satisfactorily addressed at the School level, and report on quarterly basis to the administration keeping in loop the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights. (Read with NPAC 2016, Pg. 42, Sub-objective 2.8, Priority action bullet point 6)
- Sports facility for children with special abilities children (See NPC 2016, Pg. 43)
- Safe drinking water and adequate number of separate toilets for girls (See NPAC 2016, Pg. 43 & Pg. 103, Sub-Objective 3.3., Strategies 3.3.3, Action point 13)
- Capacity building and mock drills at the village levels must be ensured by forming cadres of children and youth volunteers, with leadership of young people from the socially excluded communities and those inhabiting the most hazard prone locations. (See NPAC 2016, Pg. 103, Sub-Objective 3.3., Strategies 3.3.3, Action point 5)

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KEY PRIORITY 2: Education and Development

1. Interactive and child-friendly educational materials on the DOs and DON'Ts in disasters, environmental hazards and climate change related hazards to build the knowledge, aptitude and skills of disaster prevention. (See NPAC 2016, Pg. 78 Actions 6)
2. Capacity building and mock drills at the village levels must be ensured by forming cadres of children (from 5-18 years) and youth volunteers, with leadership of young people from the socially excluded communities and those inhabiting the most hazard prone locations (See NPAC 2016, Pg. 103, Sub-Objective 3.3., Strategies 3.3.3, Action point 5)

KEY PRIORITY 3: Protection

(See NPAC 2016, Pg. 103, 3.3.3, Action 4, 5, 6 & 12)

4. Map the specific vulnerabilities of children living in hazard prone regions of the country and develop age and gender disaggregated data of their needs at Panchayat and district levels for hazard mitigation and preparedness programmes.
5. Capacity building and mock drills at the village levels by forming cadres of children and youth volunteers, with special focus on young people from the socially excluded communities and those inhabiting the most hazard prone locations.
6. Create a system of disaggregated data collection on the total number of children affected by natural disasters.
7. Psycho-social support services for children with adoption of child friendly techniques like Arts Based Therapy and others.

KEY PRIORITY 4: Participation

7. Initiate the process of engaging with children under 18 years age, in community level meetings, town hall meetings etc. to elicit their responses to the issues and concerns they hold for their overall wellbeing and what they require for protection from disasters. (Read with NPAC 2016, Pg. 106, Action point 7)

Chapter 4: Institutional Mechanisms for Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

The NCAG will be responsible for:

- Facilitate multi-sectoral and cross-sectoral co-ordination and convergence across Ministries/Departments, civil society organisations, multi-lateral bodies (See NPAC 2016, Pg. 109, I. Roles and Responsibility of the NCAG, bullet point 2)